

## **“Right-wing populism and authoritarianism” - Report of a discussion**

*["Contributors to this site are in a process of discussion and review of key issues facing today's revolutionary movement. Published articles identified as "Discussion articles" do not necessarily reflect the agreed position of all participants."]*

Participants from fourteen countries (Spanish State, Austria, Argentina, Poland, Mexico, Ireland, Russia, Czechia, South Africa, Malawi, Croatia, Portugal, United States, Myanmar) took part in an on-line discussion on "Right-wing populism and Authoritarianism" on 14 April.

The discussion, enriched by contributions from different parts of the world, focused on the use of historical and theoretical aspects of the inter-world-war Bonapartism and fascist regimes as tools to analyse the right-wing populist and authoritarian regimes that are seen today. Understanding the real nature of such regimes, how they arise, what social forces they rest on, and what role they play needs an analysis of class dynamics and processes if an effective opposition is to be built.

*This is the first part of a discussion. The second part will analyse the current opposition to right populism and the far-right, and how best such an opposition can be built.*

### **Introduction**

Capitalism is waging an international offensive - it is on the warpath against the working class and the masses of the whole world. This global offensive with the election of right-populist governments and the increasing use of authoritarian measures manifests in several ways.

Firstly, there is the development of imperialist war with the US/Israeli attack on Iran, the threats against and blockade of Cuba, and the kidnapping of President Maduro, not forgetting the Russian attack on Ukraine and the Israeli genocide in Gaza.

Secondly, there is the endless economic crisis that is sinking millions into poverty across the global south, and increasingly in Europe, the US and other western countries, worsened by the continued attacks on worker rights.

Thirdly, there is the very grave environmental catastrophe and climate crisis, which is horrifically exacerbated by the voracious greed of big-business, and the consequences of which will hit most sharply in the global south.

All of this is accompanied by a reactionary ideological campaign to restore the 'manosphere', attacking the rights of women, migrants, the LGBTQ+ community and trans people and any other minority that gets in the way of capitalist greed.

The general framework at this stage is not fascism as such as that requires the destruction or annihilation of the organised working class. But the lengths they are prepared to go is seen by the genocide in Gaza, which is why it is critical to support the struggle of the Palestinian masses.

Our Marxist predecessors did not treat such phenomena as 'populism', 'Bonapartism' and 'fascism' as rigid models. As Trotsky warned, Bonapartism and fascism develop under specific conditions and can combine different elements in different ways. The regime of Józef Piłsudsky in Poland after his 1926 coup combined elements often associated with both Bonapartism and fascism. Lacking a strong fascist mass movement, it relied primarily on the army, the bureaucracy and the police. Despite growing repression, much of the workers' movement was left formally intact, and parliament remained in place but with sharply reduced powers.

This example demonstrates that these phenomena do not appear in pure form but as uneven and shifting combinations shaped by concrete class relations. This matters today, when regimes and movements do not correspond neatly to the classical inter-war forms.

### **Revolution and counter-revolution between the world wars**

Bonapartism and fascism arise in periods of deep capitalist crisis. In normal conditions, the ruling class prefers parliamentary rule if possible. History has shown it is even prepared to tolerate governments of social democracy which adapted to and became tamed by bourgeois parliamentary democracy. But if parliamentary rule fails, the ruling class may look for authoritarian solutions in an attempt to stabilize the situation.

In post-WWI Italy, the revolutionary crisis - the Biennio Rosso - was derailed by the reformist leaders, opening the door to counter-revolution. Fascist violence then spread across the countryside, targeting trade unionists and left-wing peasants. Italy's capitalists turned to Benito Mussolini, who was appointed Prime Minister by the king, Victor Emmanuel III. Initially he headed a coalition government and the traditional state institutions remained in place. The bourgeoisie first hoped he would restore order

without destroying the existing state system. And it was only over the next few years that the regime transformed itself into a full dictatorship.

In Germany too, fascism was not the first option chosen by the bourgeoisie. In 1918 the revolutionary movement overthrew the monarchy and placed workers' and soldiers' councils at the centre of political life, but was betrayed by the Social Democratic leadership. The government used the proto-fascist Freikorps to crush the uprising and murder leaders such as Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. For a time the ruling class was still able to govern through parliamentary democracy.

However, the crisis of German capitalism deepened during the 1920s. And as the forces of revolution and counter-revolution began to gain strength, a series of authoritarian - Bonapartist - governments emerged. The German bourgeoisie turned to open fascism as a last resort when the other solutions proved insufficient to stabilize the situation.

### **Bonapartism during capitalism's ascendancy**

For Marx, Bonapartism was an instrument of class rule that arises from a specific relationship between the classes, based on historical examples.

The first was Napoleon Bonaparte who leaned on his peasant army for support and carried out a partial counter-revolution at the end of the French bourgeois revolution. Even so, he still defended the economic and legal foundations of capitalism.

The second was Louis Bonaparte, Napoleon's nephew, who carried out a coup three years after the revolutions of 1848 when France was experiencing political paralysis and class conflict.

A further example was Otto von Bismarck who was appointed by the King and balanced between the property classes and the rising proletariat while raising a powerful military bureaucratic state apparatus above society. Each of these were examples of Bonapartism during the ascending phase of capitalism.

### **Inter-war Bonapartism leading to fascism**

Bonapartism in the period between the first and second world war was different. In the aftermath of WWI and the Russian Revolution, revolutionary waves swept across Europe. The forces of revolution and counter revolution were locked in mortal combat. In many countries, faced with revolutionary crises, the ruling class could no longer govern using parliamentary democracy and turned to extraordinary and often repressive

forms of rule, some taking the form of Bonapartism, and others developing into fully fledged fascism.

Bonapartism arose when neither of the main classes was able to decisively impose its rule. The state acquired a certain relative independence and appeared to rise above society, relying primarily on the army, bureaucracy and the police although, in the last analysis, continuing to defend the interests of the ruling class.

Unlike fascism, Bonapartism does not mobilize a mass movement relying instead on the state apparatus. This limits its capacity to completely destroy the workers' organizations. It leans on different classes at different moments, depending on the shifting balance of forces, but it doesn't actively mobilize them in the same way as fascism. For this reason, Trotsky saw such regimes as relatively weak and transitional arising in exceptional periods of crisis.

By contrast, fascism mobilizes a mass movement, drawn mainly from the petty bourgeoisie and de-classed layers, which it uses to physically destroy the working class organizations. This is the main difference between Bonapartism and fascism. Fascism is the most extreme method of preserving capitalism when all other forms of rule have failed.

### **Post World War Two Bonapartism**

After WWII, new and more stable forms of Bonapartism emerged in the former colonial world alongside the dominance of the parliamentary democracies in the advanced capitalist economies.

Peronism was a form of bourgeois Bonapartism in Argentina. Juan Peron came to power based on the mobilisation of the working class, and although he granted significant concessions, including strong trade union rights and wage increases, ultimately he defended Argentinian capitalism and the interests of the bourgeoisie and landowners. His ability to balance between the classes, relying on favourable post-war economic conditions, meant that his rule had a certain stability.

A different form of Bonapartism was found in the Stalinist regime in the USSR. Proletarian Bonapartism existed when the bureaucratic state apparatus rose above the working class, balancing between different social forces, while ultimately preserving the foundations of a nationalised socialist or post-capitalist economy.

After 1945, similar Stalinist type regimes were established in Eastern Europe and later in China, Yugoslavia and Cuba, often through war, revolution or guerrilla movements.

These, from the outset, were deformed workers' states, where capitalism was abolished, but political power was monopolised by a bureaucratic elite rather than workers' democracy.

The existence of these regimes was made possible by the specific post-war international equilibrium, including the division of the world between capitalism and the Soviet block during the Cold War. This global balance allowed different forms of Bonapartist rule, both bourgeois and proletarian to persist for decades under relatively stable conditions.

### **The situation today**

A dialectical approach to analysing today's phenomena needs an examination of their historical roots, the forces that are in opposition and how they could possibly develop. This aspect will be developed in a deeper way in the second part of this discussion. But what is happening today is not a one-way process, there are many political processes, including electoral conflict, popular protests, and even geopolitical contradictions that are still to play out. The final outcome will depend on the balance of class forces as they develop.

All three of the above processes lie at the heart of the defeat of Orban in Hungary. Now if the opposition built up in the past years, because of the terrible situation of the economy, of corruption, of the attacks on women and the LGBTQ+ community, can develop a real working-class socialist alternative, that will lead to one outcome. But if this doesn't happen and Magyar, a former member of Orban's party, continues unheeded, there will be a different outcome.

It is not possible to analyse today's far right forces by simply cut-and-pasting the characteristics of Bonapartism and fascism as they existed in the 1920s and 30s into the current situation. Not least because the balance of class forces is completely different. The existence of the Soviet Union, the revolutionary uprising in Spain, the opposition to fascism in Italy and Germany, alongside the burning anger of billions fighting for liberation from imperialism in the colonial world meant that the struggle between the classes was at a much higher level, with a stalemate between the two.

At the same time, it is completely wrong to dismiss the dangers that do exist today. There is a very worrying, dangerous situation developing in the world. While parliamentary democracy is the capitalist class' preferred form of rule, it is far from the established norm across the world. 75% of the world's population live under one form of authoritarianism or another. Elsewhere democratic rights are under serious attack.

## **How Bonapartism is consolidated**

To avoid confusion it is necessary to accurately assess which stage in each country has been reached, what turning points have been passed and how far the situation has moved along the spectrum from bourgeois democracy, through Bonapartism towards a fascist dictatorship.

The example of how the new capitalist Russia became a Bonapartist regime is instructive. There was no one moment, but a process of change over time. After the moves to restore capitalism and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, an unstable and chaotic bourgeois democracy was established, in which the gangland struggle between the different oligarchs to grab hold of the privatised state property continued. Elections, barely democratic, took place.

When, in 1993, the Parliament opposed Yeltsin's plans, the democratic facade was dropped. Tanks were ordered to attack the parliament's building. Elections became increasingly fraudulent. By the end of the 1990s, the newly enriched oligarchs needed an end to chaos, and the consolidation of the new Russian capitalist state. Putin was their preferred presidential candidate. His strong-arm credentials were established by launching the brutal war on Chechnya. After his election in 2000, he turned to bring the oligarchs into line - some were forced into exile, others met stickier ends.

Formally, democratic rights continued to exist - in 2007 twenty parties participated in the election. But in 2011, the result was so obviously falsified, significant protests took place in Moscow and elsewhere. Most were legal, but the last was brutally attacked by the riot police. This coincided with Euromaidan in Ukraine, the Kremlin's annexation of Crimea, and the start of the military conflict in East Ukraine.

In the wave of patriotism that followed, the regime tightened the screws of repression. Legal protests became impossible, only single-person pickets were tolerated with a high risk of arrest. The use of video surveillance to fight Covid was then continued against the opposition. The escalation of the war in 2022 saw the rapid crushing of the youthful anti-war protests, mass arrests and the widespread clamp-down on free speech. Elections are completely stage-managed, a very small clique around the President controls everything, and anyone who opposes him swallows an unpleasant substance, falls from a high building, or is incarcerated in prison.

There are echoes of these events occurring in many countries. In Turkey the main opposition candidate to Erdogan has been arrested. For Bonapartism to become firmly consolidated, a number of qualitative changes are needed, including for example, the

abolition of democratic elections, the end of free speech, major changes in the state structure, unrestricted actions by the police or the military, and the concentration of power in the hands of one person or a junta (council).

Bonapartism is obviously consolidated in a number of countries - China, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia. Others, such as Turkey are moving in that direction. There is an increasing number of countries in which the masses are desperate for change, but in the absence of a working-class alternative capable of challenging the regime, and a bourgeois incapable of maintaining stability, the military is stepping in to take power. For example, in Myanmar (despite the reclothing of the military in civilian dress), or in Egypt and more recently in Madagascar, where a section of the military used the GenZ uprising to take power.

### **Right-populism - a dangerous phenomena**

At the lower end of the spectrum, although moving rapidly upwards, are the Americas, countries of Europe and Japan, in which there is the growth and strengthening of very dangerous, right-wing populist forces, which present themselves as representing the ordinary people against a corrupt elite.

Populism is widely used today to describe movements, parties and regimes without much precision. In classical Marxist literature, the term is not central, although Lenin defined populism (narodism) as the "very old ideology of Russia's peasant democrats". Trotsky spoke of the difference between left populists (narodniks) and revolutionaries as being that the former lacked any understanding of class struggle and the role of the working class.

Today, the term right-wing populism can be useful when referring to movements or parties, but when it comes to analysing any regime, it is necessary to be as precise as possible, in the context of the balance of forces and the social base of the regime.

Today's right populists understand class struggle, consciously representing the interests of a very rich section of the bourgeoisie. They disguise their aims, brush over the class realities of society, at least in public and make their appeal to those who have lost out from the world's polycrises, to turn their anger against outsiders.

Once in power, they increasingly rapidly move in a Bonapartist direction. Trump's use of ICE, his sacking of military heads, threats to take control of elections and his use of war are clear examples of a move towards a more consolidated Bonapartism. It is not likely he can cancel elections at this stage, as it would meet too much resistance.

Today's wave of right populism and authoritarianism has not simply fallen from the sky. It is a consequence of the deep crisis of bourgeois society that has developed during the decades of neoliberalism, during which many, many people have lost out. In Iran, for example, 90% of workers have contracts lasting just one year or less. To call that a precariat is an understatement. This in turn has led to a historic collapse of confidence in the traditional bourgeois institutions, including the former workers' parties. Britain is not exceptional, but at the last election the combined vote for the Tory and Labour parties was a historical low.

The first wave of left-populist forces - Chavez and Morales in Latin America, Syriza in Greece, the anti-globalisation movement and so on - failed to offer an alternative that could break the stranglehold of capital. At a later stage, a second wave - Kirchner, Obrador, Sanders, Corbin, Melachon, Yamamoto - has been a new feature in this picture. They talk of the 99%, propose economic democracy, social justice, anti-capitalism, but they have no coherent alternative to capitalism. As importantly, they have no strategy to build an organisation capable of overthrowing it.

And that is the critical weakness of left populism. The multi crises caused by capitalism cannot be resolved without getting rid of capitalism, but without aiming to overthrow it the left-populists have to accept capitalism's rules. Right populists do not have that problem - their task is to protect their capitalist friends, they do so using demagoguery and by building hatred and division to hide their real aims.

It also needs to be underlined that right-populism has a clear material base. The global bourgeoisie after the 2008 crisis has accelerated its retreat from neoliberal ideology, or more specifically from globalisation, the "rule of law" and deregulation in favour of economic protectionism. The strengthening of protectionism needs nationalism and militarisation. When the right-populists attack the corrupt elite, what they are really doing is attacking that section of the ruling elite that benefitted from the neo-liberal era. This explains why, rather than being driven by simple personal hatred of the Democrats, Trump is taking action against a small layer of the US ruling elite.

The material basis of right populism is backed up by increasingly reactionary ideology. Nativism is one element that unites the right-populist leaders. Trump believes only those born in the US with European settler roots are genuine Americans, and anyone else is an outsider, who can be subjected to increasingly brutal anti-migrant attacks. The elevation of the rights of ethnic Russians by Putin's regime is accompanied by new laws restricting minority rights to learn their own languages. But Putin's imperialist patronage extends the role of ethnic Russians to be the core element of the Slavic culture.

Modi, finding it more difficult to maintain the significant economic growth seen in the first period of his rule, is increasingly driven by Hindutva - elevating the rights of Hindus above all others. Xi Jinping sees the future of China as being increasingly Han-centric, while Japan's Sanae Takaichi has shifted the LDP significantly to the nationalist right under pressure from the more nativist parties of the far-right.

The Islamic world is of course not immune from nativism. As Turkey's Erdogan has moved increasingly in an authoritarian tradition, he has leant more on the principle that the true inheritors of Turkiye are the supporters of political Islam - mainly members of the AKP - while opponents are presented as representing alien and foreign interests.

Despite such examples though, the reverse side of the nativist coin is the strengthening of Islamophobia globally. This is seen not only in the anti-migrant campaigns in Europe and the US, but also in India with Modi's attacks on the Muslim population, in China's anti-Uighur policies, in Myanmar with the attacks on the Rohingya populations. The reaction to this is the radicalisation of Muslims seen in part by the scope of the Palestinian solidarity actions.

The conclusion from this is that just as there is no 'pure Bonapartism', nor is there a 'pure right-populism' and any analysis should see the transit from one to the other, the dynamic, and understand the process of ebb and flow. Nor should it be ignored that there are fascistic people and fascistic tendencies that can appear throughout the process. Often fascist groups can be utilised by Bonapartism regimes to do their dirty work, whipping them up to attack migrants, LGBTQ+ groups and so on.

### **Whose interests are protected by right-populism and the far-right**

Just as it is impossible to deny the strengthening of support for right-populism globally, it is also impossible to deny that it has won support from a layer of the working class, even if that support may be unstable and is potentially unsustainable if a viable alternative was to be presented.

Despite this, the fundamental nature of these groups has not changed. Primarily, they are initiated by, have the support of, and represent the ruling elite, or more specifically the most cynical and brutal sections of the ruling elite. Modi's BJP, for example, has traditionally been the party of the rich and urban middle class. Trump's MAGA is financed overwhelmingly by billionaire 'megadonors' particularly from the crypto, AI, energy and finance sectors. Australia's One Nation Party is openly backed by multi-millionaires and billionaires.

The same applies in today's consolidated Bonapartist regimes. As the Mullahs took power after the revolutionary overthrow of the Shah in 1979, they were forced for a period to accept some of the gains of the revolution. The oil-fields were nationalised, there were elements of workers' control, and significant social reforms. But this period did not last for long as the Mullah's counter revolution was consolidated. It turned on the workers' movement and the left with the brutal clamp down and daily executions of key leaders. This allowed the Mullahs and Revolutionary Guards to seize hold of large parts of the economy, which they manage with brutal capitalist efficiency.

The Myanmar military using the two corporations Myanmar Economic Holdings Limited (MEHL) and Myanmar Economic Corporation (MEC) controls a large part of the economy - what is known as 'Khaki capitalism'.

Putin too, who was supported by the new oligarchs, came to power precisely to further their interests. But he quickly moved against a section of the oligarchs and has now fully consolidated power based on a form of state controlled, oligarch managed corporate capitalism. In China the leading CCP figures are tightly entwined with the interests of corporate capitalism.

### **Working class support for right-populism**

Some organisations with a fascist pedigree such as Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia* or Le Pen's *Rassemblement national* have had to brush over their past in order to win a wider electorate. It has to be said though, that in a whole number of countries there is a significant section of the working class for a number of different reasons that is supporting the right populist parties.

This does not mean that such parties do not have a stable right-wing electoral base. In Milei's case, his party has a stable core supporting his calls for "strength and freedom" consisting of 20-30% of the electorate. The remainder of those who vote are expressing their anger and deep rejection of the traditional forces.

Academic research into who, according to Social class, voted for Reform in Britain in 2024 is very revealing. 36% of Reform voters were from social classes A&B (Higher managerial and professional occupations), which is much higher than the proportion of A&B in the general population (22%). 22% of reform voters belonged to the C1 group (middle management and occupations) compared to 31% of the population. 23% of Group C2 (skilled manual workers) voted Reform compared to 21% of the population. Although 26% of the population belong to groups D&E (Semi-skilled, unskilled, unemployed) only 21% of Reform voters belonged to that group.

The same survey revealed that 67% of Reform voters had previously voted Tory, and only 4% had voted Labour. The very latest English council and Scottish/Welsh parliamentary elections (May 26) confirm this picture. Reform mainly increased its support from disillusioned Tories and those who had not voted before. Defectors from Labour either did not vote or went in droves to the more left-wing Greens.

While in general this reflects the situation in other countries, there are contradictions. In the US, the two demographics that voted in favour of Harris (51-53%) were those with an income less than \$30,000 and those over \$100,000. In Farage's case, at the last election a third of his voters had a household income of less than £25,000 (\$18500).

Those working class layers that do vote for the right populists will tend to be in areas that have suffered deindustrialisation, those who have completely lost out during the era of neoliberalisation, and see no hope for the future. In Australia, working people who vote for One Nation say that they don't trust any of the politicians, including One Nation, but say they have no means of control in this situation, so they use their vote as a protest.

There are other important cross-currents, in particular among younger voters. Only a small proportion of Reform voters (<10%) were young and over half of those had high incomes over £70,000. Modi, at least in his first years of rule had the support of a layer of youth who had benefitted from the relative economic growth and were, in particular, taken in by Modi's promise to boost the crypto-economy. In Argentina too, Milei won the support of a layer of petti-bourgeois youth attracted by the get-rich schemes associated with cryptocurrencies.

The picture in Europe is more complex. It is easy to say, as many do, that the youth is turning to the far-right, but the real process is polarised.

In recent EU, regional and national elections far-right parties have scored strongly among young people. In France support for the RN from 18-24 year-olds grew from 6 to 33% from 2002-24. Youth support for the German AfD grew from 5 to 19% from 2013-25. In the Spanish State, support for the far-right has exploded among people under 35, from 4% in 2019 to 30% last September. In Italy though, the youth is not strongly behind Meloni. The proportion of youth who vote for her is lower than that of the overall electorate. And in the recent referendum, 70% of young people voted 'no' against her.

But whilst in France while 33% of youth voted for RN, 48% voted for the radical left Nouveau Front Populaire. In Germany 19% voted for AfD, but 27% voted for Die

Linke. This is a volatile section of the population. Indeed in the US a turn away from support for Trump can be seen amongst young voters. 70% of young people now do not approve of Trump's activities, which is a turn-around from the previous period.

There is also a very clear polarisation between male and female voters, particularly, but not only, amongst the youth. In Germany while 40% of young men vote far right, only 20% of young women do. The influence of the manosphere around people like Andrew Tate has been strong. The victory of Trump has been a major factor. Corporations and the mainstream media, which had presented themselves as promoting 'wokism' in the aftermath of the #metoo movement saw his victory as a green light to retreat, and the process quickly spread globally.

The stratification was perhaps first seen in Eastern Europe, for example in Poland in the aftermath of the abortion campaign. In 2016-7 in Russia the anti-corruption protests initiated by Alexey Navalny saw significant numbers of young people take to the streets. In the political vacuum, a section of young men were drawn to the ideas of libertarianism, which promoted the possibility of an 'honest capitalism', based on property rights and the freedom to act without restriction within that property. This led to a reaction from a number of the young women who objected to their bodies and their rights being treated in that way.

The more radical approach of young women is increasingly being noted by bourgeois analysts. One recent academic report concluded that there is a growing consensus among young women that a capitalist feminism is fundamentally contradictory, and that a systematic change is needed to truly empower women.

An article in Jacobin reported that in Austria in 2017, a majority of blue collar workers voted for the far right in the election. The same article went on to say, though, that only 30% of workers organised in trade unions supported the Freedom Party. This is a warning.

The leading German labour sociologist, Klaus Dörre, pointed to the emergence of a far-right pole in the factory councils of the automobile industry. This implies that there is a layer of men who have lost out through neoliberalism, and who fear for their future. In this way support is stronger amongst heterosexual men, particularly from younger, less educated and rural demographics.

A number of left or left-moving trade union leaders who on some issues have a good position are opening the door to work with the right-populists. Shaun Fain of the US Autoworkers' Union has spoken out openly in support of Trump's tariffs. Britain's Unite

the Union's leader Sharon Graham welcomes increased arms expenditure and the environmentally harmful oil and nuclear industries

### **The far-right's "international"**

The far-right is attempting to organise internationally - to establish a 'reactionary international'. The convening of the "Shield of America" summit involving twelve Latin American and Caribbean countries which met at Trump's Florida base is an example at state level.

Russia has been at the centre of other attempts. In 2025 in St Petersburg's Mariinsky Palace, the oligarch financed "Paladins International Sovereignist League" was formed by fascist parties from more than twenty countries, who were welcomed by the head of the Russian Church and leading figures from Putin's party. They included Spanish Falanges, Mexico's UNR, the AfD, BNP and fascists from Hungary, France, as well of course ideologues from the Kremlin, including the fascist Dugan.

Not hedging its bets, in early 2026 the pro-Kremlin "Just Russia" party established a "Sovintern", uniting, they claim, 100 various pro-Kremlin parties - neo-Stalinists, former liberation movements such as the Sandinistas and red-brown groups such as Galloway's 'Workers' Party'.

The significance of such events is not merely the coming together of like-minded reactionaries. The practical side is their use of international links to gain experience of combat. Some simply sign up into the various mercenary forces such as the US-based DynCorp, Blackwater or the Russian Wagner group. Independently, foreign far-right groups have been active on both sides of the Ukraine war, in Syria and elsewhere.

### **Right-populism and the far-right in Latin America**

With Milei in Argentina and the victory of José Antonio Kast in Chile, the ruling class as well as reformists and 'progressive governments' are talking about the rise of the far-right and fascism as if they already control the situation. But if it is true that the fascists have already won, it will not be possible to do anything to change the situation in the next period.

The situation though is still in flux. Before the first round of the Peruvian Presidential election the ruling class and its media were all predicting a race between two far-right candidates. But the working class and poor intervened, pushing support for the left candidate Roberto Sanchez, with the real possibility he could win in June's second

round. Particularly after the arrest of Pedro Castillo, who won the 2022 election, the situation is more complex.

There is a political crisis developing in all the countries of Latin America, but the attempts by the ruling elite to use Milei as an example of a super-powerful figure does not match reality. A survey conducted in Argentina in March showed that Milei now had the support of 36% - more than a ten percent fall from 48% last year. This appears to be an accurate reflection of the reality in Argentina, and the declining capacity that Milei still has to implement his policies. The main problem for Argentina, as for other countries in Latin America is the weakness of the left.

On 19 February, the trade union federation Confederación General del Trabajo (CGT) organised a general strike against the proposed reform of the Labour law. This had widespread support managing to mobilise almost 95% of union members. But the union is led by Peronists. Even though the Labour law went through the Congress, the CGT leadership failed to develop the movement against it. This is the reality of the left in Argentina, but elsewhere the leadership of the movement is not interested in the development of class struggle.

In Chile after the big demonstrations in 2019 against the right-wing government and its neoliberal reforms, the leftist Gabriel Boric won the 2021 election, defeating Kast. Although Kast has now taken power, it is still too early to see how his regime will develop. What is interesting is that in 2021, Kast fought a hard right campaign focusing very strongly on the need to attack women's rights. In the 2025 election, Kast played down the gender issue in his campaigning in an attempt to gain more female votes, and in part relying on the propaganda of femo-nationalist groups.

So for Chile, where Kast does not have solid support, and Argentina under Milei, it is not accurate to speak of consolidated Bonapartism regimes, even though elements of fascism and Bonapartism are present. In neither case have they succeeded in completely blocking class struggle.

The situation in El Salvador is worse. The regime under Nayib Bukele can be described as Bonapartist with its 'megaprisons' and the campaign against the gangs. As the gangs are closely linked with drug-trafficking, the jailing of all gang-members has enabled the Bukele regime to build support. As a consequence, there is now a proposal in Congress to approve the indefinite election of Bukele.

A significant development in response to the strengthening of the far-right has been the convening in Barcelona of the “Global Progressive Mobilisation” by Pedro Sanchez involving the Presidents of Colombia, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa and key US democrats.

At best, this is an attempt to coordinate between governments, as the reformist left are not genuinely interested in developing a movement against the far-right, hoping instead that it will be defeated in the next election. It does however draw attention to the dangers of the far-right and fascism, and the need to develop the independence of the working class with the use of tactics like Argentina’s general strike and the call by Chilean feminists to oppose Kast’s attacks on women’s rights.

As working people realize the real intentions of the right-wing, they are stepping up actions that impose limitations on how far they can go. The demonstration to commemorate the end of the Argentinian Junta was the largest for some years. The 8 March demonstration was also the biggest in the last few years.

In a distorted way resistance was also seen in the results of the Peruvian election, where under the threat of a second round between two far-right wingers, a figure who is seen as from the left jumped from sixth place to end up in the second round.

It has to be recognised that the right-wing advances are being made because of the failure of the reformist parties in the past, such as Peronism in Argentina and Chavismo in Venezuela, Podemos in Spain and Syriza in Greece, because it is impossible to have a capitalism in which everyone wins. For the capitalists to boost or even maintain their profits, it is necessary to attack the working class and sometimes even smash it.

In this situation the left needs to overcome its sectarianism and to work as revolutionaries closely with all the oppressed to progress and push forward the feminist, anti-racist, climate struggles, even though many participants may not, at this stage, understand the need to create a socialist society. It needs to engage with other struggles or in other spaces so that genuine working class organisations to unite men, women and youth in common struggle can be built around a socialist, feminist political strategy capable of challenging capitalism.

### **Authoritarianism in Africa - a legacy of imperialism**

There are important and different processes occurring across different countries in Africa. A number of regimes use extremely authoritarian measures to stay in power. The

recent elections in Tanzania, Mozambique and Zimbabwe were clearly seen by the majority of people as rigged. Even before the elections different actions were taken that amounted to voter suppression.

At the same time military juntas have taken power through coups in other countries particularly in West Africa.

One way of categorising these regimes would be to divide them according to whether or not they came to power as a result of former Liberation Movements. Zanu PF came to power in Zimbabwe 46 years ago. It has managed to stay in power since then by attacking its opponents, and simply pressurising voters. On the other hand there is DR Congo where almost immediately after gaining independence from Belgium, the government was toppled.

But when a deeper look is taken, however a country is categorised, whatever has happened is a response to their colonial history and today's imperialist interventions. In the three decades 1960-90 there were 120 coup attempts across Africa, just over half of which succeeded. Now the number exceeds 200. In many cases these coups took place under the direct influence of the CIA and other imperialist bodies, who have an active interest in maintaining control over the natural resources, and the labor within these countries.

Another important aspect is how the liberation struggles were conducted. In many cases a small educated elite played a large role, and they would usually rise to lead the movements. They played an important role in championing independence from colonialism. But once in power this layer, essentially a petty-bourgeois layer, was very susceptible to the trappings of the capitalist system. So instead of following through on the radical calls for democracy and a complete change in the economic structures, or even for redrawing the borders, they continued to use the same borders with the same military structures that had been imposed by the colonialists. They insisted on maintaining nationalist policies after independence as an attempt to consolidate their power

This dealt a serious blow to the radical nature of the liberation movements of the 1950-60s. The nationalist outlooks of the petty-bourgeois layers cut across the potential for the anti-imperialist pan-Africa movement. By the 1970-80s the rhetoric of these leaders had changed from anti-imperialism to narrow nationalism, reflecting their own interests. .

While there are important differences between countries, one of the issues that comes up time and again is this attempt by the former liberation leaders and the new elites that arose in the 60s and 70s and so forth to double down on their role as the leaders of the country.

One method they use is the carrying out of coup d'états to maintain their hold on power. The repeated influence of the military, which in most cases plays a very destructive role is obvious. They may say they do, but they are not acting in the interests of the masses, even though they often use mass uprisings and upheavals as an excuse for a section to take over political power as they did recently in Madagascar.

In 2017 in Zimbabwe the huge wave of mass uprisings was hijacked by the military elites who are still in power today. They are currently carrying out another coup, this time a constitutional coup in which they are amending the constitution to remove direct presidential elections, in effect allowing the current president to stay in power for much longer.

In Mali, since 2022 when the military launched a coup with the support of Russian mercenaries essentially ending the influence of French imperialism in the country it is difficult to estimate what is actually happening as political activity has been essentially banned. The vacuum it seems has been fueled by various jihadis and separatists, who it seems are on the verge of taking the country over.

In Tanzania too, shortly before the elections opposition leaders were arrested so the masses are left without political options. In such situations, people can go out to protest and fight for something better but in many instances they have no vehicle to pursue their interests.

Polls in South Africa suggest that up to 40% of the eligible voters don't actually have any political parties that they feel they can trust, so they won't vote for any party. This is also seen with the drop in trade union membership. This is despite an increase in the number of workers going on strike, but they don't wait for the trade unions as they've been betrayed and let down so many times before.

Something similar is taking place in Nigeria, where the leaders of the trade movement are often pushed by the masses to go for a general strike and then end up postponing or canceling that strike at the last minute after making a deal with government forces.

**Trumpism - in the heart of the beast**

The reactionary policies of the second Trump government, occurring in the context of a global turn towards the far-right, have led to an increased public debate about the political character of both Trump himself, of his political movement, and of the United States generally.

Among liberals, a loose consensus has emerged that Trump is a fascist, although this designation exists solely as an accusation, rather than a clear political label. It is undeniable that within Trump's administration there exist true ideological fascists. The most prominent example being Stephen Miller, Trump's Deputy Chief-of-Staff, widely viewed as one of the most influential figures in the White House. Miller's ties to openly fascist figures and organizations are well documented including VDARE, Sailer and American Renaissance.

The second Trump administration has also escalated its white nationalist and fascist rhetoric. Dept of Homeland Security recruitment ads openly appeal to white nationalists with thinly veiled codewords and Nazi inspired imagery.

Trump has backed this rhetoric with action, with massive 'immigration' sweeps in Chicago, Minneapolis, and elsewhere. The total number of deportations remains comparable to, and possibly lower than, those under Biden and Obama, but the arrests are carried out by an increasingly paramilitarized ICE, which has loosened recruiting standards, to allow members of the fascist militia the Proud Boys who were involved in Trump's 2021 coup attempt to join.

The presence alone of fascist ideologues and rhetoric does not make a government fascist. Trump was elected with a clear popular mandate, and not only that, but the views of the most radical members of his administration are not truly out of line with the existing conservative bourgeoisie.

Trump's victories in 2016 and 2024 did not come through a defeat of labor or the organized left. Not only did such a defeat not bring Trump to power, but it is difficult to single out any such occurrence in the United States, as at no point has there been a unified enough working class movement to require a classic fascist movement.

Another complication emerges when comparing the current conditions in the United States to those of the past. In his work, "Fascism: What it is and How To Fight It" Trotsky correctly identifies that fascism is in part a mass movement of the petty bourgeoisie, acting as "the gendarmes of capital". This phenomenon is also seen in the

United States. In the South, Black workers were terrorized and murdered by the thousands by the proto-fascist Ku Klux Klan. In addition to enforcing racial terror, the KKK also served as a tool of the capitalists against organized labor, notably in Tampa Florida, where they were unleashed to crush a general strike in 1932. In Detroit Michigan, the Black Legion were closely integrated into the private security apparatus of the fascist industrialist Henry Ford as well as the local government.

These forces played a dual role, suppressing labor and violently enforcing the racial caste system on behalf of both the landlords in the south and the bourgeois industrialists in the North. Unlike fascist or bonapartist regimes however, the collusion between the bourgeois state and the terrorist formations of the petty bourgeoisie in the United States was fairly stable. In the southern US, the authoritarian rule of the white bourgeoisie, enforced by both state forces and a mobilized petty bourgeoisie, endured for over 75 years, collapsing only in the late 1960s when the state conceded to reforms demanded by the Civil Rights movement, reforms which are now under threat from the Trump administration..

In this context, the United States under the second Trump government cannot be accurately described as fascist, even if Trump himself might be. Still, Trump has broken from the status quo of the bourgeois right in important ways.

Transphobia is a ubiquitous feature of the far-right, but under Trump, the US has seen a dramatic escalation in attacks on trans people. The federal government's endorsement of transphobia serves as carte blanche for reactionaries on a local level. In Kansas, the driver's licenses of hundreds of trans people have been unilaterally revoked, on the grounds that the gender identification on the licenses is false. In many states, gender affirming care has been effectively banned.

### **Trumpism provoking violence**

Trump's use of ICE as a personal militia is most concerning when considered in the context of the events of Jan 6th 2021. Electoral interference is hardly uncommon in US elections, but not since the end of Reconstruction in the Corrupt Bargain of 1877 had the threat of open violence been used in an attempt to overturn a federal election. Trump's coup attempt on Jan 6th collapsed within hours, having not even come close to achieving its goal. This is in no small part due to the incompetence of the putschists, who represented simply the most gullible section of Trump's base.

The move towards ICE as a personal militia, and the precedent set by Trump of using them as scab labor illustrates the break between Trumpism and the prior status quo of the American bourgeoisie.

If fascism today has not developed to the stage of mass violence, it is impossible to ignore that the increase in far-right and fascist ideology is accompanied by a rise in fascist terror not just in the US, but globally. It is usually dismissed by the establishment and its media as some form of a nihilist breakdown of society, or as meaningless attacks.

The far-right though has a long history of such actions. The 1980 Bologna massacre, the 1995 Oklahoma city bombing, Columbine High School in 1999, the 2011 Norway attacks, and the massacres in Christchurch New Zealand and El Paso Texas in 2019 are all grim examples of fascist terror.. There is an increase in the frequency of mass shootings, which bourgeois media attributes vaguely to 'nihilism'. In reality, these attacks have a common thread, most of those carrying out the attacks are not simply inspired by nihilism, but are fascists. Not only this, they often have direct links with the police and intelligence apparatuses. Many of the far-right online forums which inspire these incidents have either been run by, or infiltrated by federal agents. In this way they are able to conduct what they call the 'strategy of tension', whereby fascist terror outside of the state apparatus is used as a justification to strengthen security forces within the bourgeois state.

These actions serve to heighten the sense of chaos in society that worries the petty-bourgeois, and a section of the working class. It drives them to seek some sort of stability, and in the absence of an alternative turn to the right-populists and far-right. Marxists must take a balanced approach to these sorts of attacks. First and foremost to acknowledge the fear and pain that these attacks inflict. However they must also be placed in their proper context. Although these horrific events are a factor, they so far are just part of the far-right threat and should be analyzed as such. In particular, they have the potential in the longer term to directly feed into a mass terror and paramilitary wing of the far-right.

The logic of the situation in the US today points to the continuing growth of the far-right threats. It is important to be clear on how to fight this threat, how to fight the rise of fascism. There are two failed strategies.

One is popular frontism, that is broad unity with liberals and sections of the bourgeoisie to fight the rise of fascism. This has been a complete failure, as it does not develop a

strong alternative to the conditions that fuel the far-right right. The other is to rely on the bourgeois state to act against the far right, to disempower it, or prosecute leaders of the far right. The limitations of that approach are seen in the US in real time. For years, Trump and his entire movement were prosecuted by the bourgeois state, including the January 6th putchists. Not only did these actions not stop the Trumpists, they may even have given the far-right legitimacy by showing they really were against the establishment. And when Trump came to power he pardoned everyone.

What is needed is a completely independent working class response able to present revolutionary socialist alternatives to the current system. There has been a failure of the left to offer solutions to the problems facing the working class, including all aspects of oppression. This is one side of the problem. The other is that, not just in the US, but globally the working class does not have real strong independent institutions, with left organisations either hanging on the coat-tails of the bourgeois parties, or simply acting as sectarians, recruiting and doing activism without focusing on the building up and strengthening of the elementary organizations and institutions of the working class.

These are the building blocks, which if armed with a real class-based perspective for unity of all elements of the working class, can lead a real struggle to defeat these far-right forces and replace capitalism, which creates those forces with a democratic socialist society.

### **Growth of the European far-right**

Support for the far-right in Europe has grown strongly in recent years, accelerated by Covid and the Ukraine war. In the final analysis, this is due to objective developments with the deepening crisis of capitalism. But the subjective factor with the failure of progressive reformism and the weakness of the organized left is also important. In general, the left's failure to treat struggles against oppression seriously allowed the reactionary offensive to go further and reach into the working class.

As a consequence, far-right parties have been able to position themselves as the main anti-system and anti-elite forces. In general, the ruling class has encouraged this even if, at this stage, it is not prepared to move too far in the direction of fascism. In doing so, the traditional ruling parties have shifted to the right and increased their use of authoritarian measures and oppression as they push austerity and pour billions into historic rearmament.

The recent fortnight-long protests and blockades in Ireland, provoked by the 28% increase in the price of petrol and diesel, were extremely disruptive. An alliance, mainly of truck drivers, farmers and transport business owners, organized a really effective blockade of infrastructure all over the South of Ireland, with attempts to spread it to the North. Heavy tractors were used to block Dublin's city centre and the country's main oil refinery. Hundreds of thousands participated in demonstrations. These demands exposed Ireland's dependence on fossil fuels.

Although the blockades were led by people driving big trucks and tractors, mainly farmers and hauliers, they very quickly snowballed and were joined by thousands of people. A large proportion of petrol stations were basically empty, so people couldn't get fuel for their cars. Yet the response of the state was extremely repressive, especially for a country which doesn't have, until now, a very repressive state.

Yet pepper spray was used on protesters and the army called in at the oil refinery. Although it wasn't used, the very threat enraged protesters. On top of that the media spread stories to undermine the protests about people missing hospital appointments because they were stuck in the blockade. There was a rural element to the people engaging in the protests, people who are let down by the healthcare system on a daily basis because they must always travel for their hospital appointments. This further enraged the protesters.

In the end the government was under intense pressure to give into these demands and announced a package worth just over half a billion euro to help small businesses, with a very small concession for ordinary people with a small reduction in the fuel cost.

Although initially the protest was led by the drivers and small business owners, very soon other leaders emerged. Some of the more high-profile ones were connected to the organized far-right. One of the main protesters speaking to media had in the past made rape jokes about Greta Thunberg. Another spoke of the role of women to breed. They were accompanied by established far-right politicians.

Some left groups did attempt to intervene based on the fact that many of the people involved were there because they just hate the government and the existence of an intense cost of living crisis. For many it wasn't just about the truckers or price of fuel. It was about the price of everything. But when some of the more high profile left activists tried to make an appearance, they were abused. There was a very right-populist element with lots of Irish tricolor flags.

In that context it was only really possible to make a public statement supporting the right to protest, and calling out the police and government repression, but also calling out the fact that some of the leaders were part of the far right and pointing to their record. But a more developed intervention might be more suitable in the future, as it is very likely that the kind of protests that will happen in the future will be similar, petty bourgeois in nature but attracting a lot of ordinary workers who are just frustrated and fed up with things.

## **Southern Europe**

In the Spanish State, there are many contradictions in the narrative of the far right, which are exposed when they are actually tested. There was an election for the Provincial Parliament of Castilla y Leon in March. Despite an increase in turn-out of a few percent compared to that in 2022, at 65% it still means 35% have no party they see as their own. The right-wing Popular Party won two more seats to reach 33. PSOE also got two more to reach 30. The far-right Vox gained one more to reach 14.

This is very worrying not just for the left, but for the bourgeois of the Spanish State. At the next general election polls show the Popular Party could win, but probably not by themselves, so they will have to rely on Vox. During March's election, the leader of Vox visited some of the villages. Typically he would turn up by the village church in a beautiful car, in a beautiful suit ready for the photo-op. Further down the street the young people would all turn out with the occasional older person to shout 'fascist' There was a real polarisation - the young, particularly young women would oppose Vox. While those that supported Vox were older, with very few local people.

It should not be forgotten that for every process, there is a counter process. There are villages in Castilla y Leon close to the border with the Basque Country, which mostly use services such as healthcare from there. So now there are petitions circulating in the bars and shops to join the Basque country. Examples such as this, although small, demonstrate the limitations of the far-right. There is not a high level of popular support for them but people are desperate because of the economy, low pay and so on.

There is the issue of the armed groups that the fascists use. Last summer in the UK there were the racist mobs who were whipped up by the far-right to attack and try to burn down the hostels housing migrants. The British bourgeois at this stage did not want this to spread, so clamped down quickly, leaving groups like those around Tommy Robinson relatively isolated. These actions though allowed the government itself to step up its anti-migrant policies.

In the Spanish State the far-right has also tried to move against immigrants. But they find it hard. So they are using companies to evict squatters who occupy flats, when they have nowhere else to live. But the people who work for the companies are far-right activists, they are kicking people out from their homes particularly in Madrid and Barcelona.

The contradiction is that Sanchez and the PSOE have won the vote to legalize half a million "illegals". Illegal is a misnomer. Sanchez is widely attacked across Europe by the right who claim he has opened the doors to hundreds of thousands of criminals from Latin America and North Africa in. But to gain citizenship in the Spanish State, a person needs a certificate from the country of origin's police confirming that they have no criminal record. So not only is it impossible for criminals to immigrate, many Spanish understand that migrants work in the health and welfare services, particularly with the growing demographic crisis.

Vox is increasing its presence in the municipalities. There they deny that domestic violence exists, calling it inter-family violence. It says there is no special oppression of women. As a consequence, they are recalling expenditure used to help refugees, to provide for women's refuges, and so on. They are obviously homophobic. If they are to gain power nationally, they want to control education, and limit the teaching of Catalan and Basque languages. At a certain stage massive movements in opposition to these measures are likely, which is a key factor holding the bourgeois from giving Vox a free hand at this stage.

### **Weakness of labour unions in the Balkans**

In Croatia, earlier this year, the main trade unions organised a protest to raise the average wage from about 1400 euros to the EU average of 2200 euros. In reality it demonstrated the weakness of workers' organisations in the country, as although they can organise a public demonstration, they had no intention of taking it further by organising in the workplaces for a strike, or even general strike. They try to stay within the rules but in doing so they end up disorganising the movement. This adds to the crisis of the left in Croatia, where even the more radical left seem incapable of relating to the actual problems faced by the masses.

This appears to be a general problem globally, although it is much more pronounced in countries where the trade unions are already weak. As capitalism has developed, particularly over the past 60-70 years, it has developed a modern society that is much more bureaucratised. In comparison to the trade union and left organisations of the inter-war period, despite the problems, they were more active, prepared to enter militant

struggle as protagonists. When the nature of trade unions today is examined, it is seen that they too are affected by this, they accept the restrictions that the capitalist state places on them which are intended to limit any radical actions. The whole of today's left is further affected by this as, while it is necessary to work in the trade unions, the need to break out of these top-down imposed limitations is often forgotten.

In this sense the left needs to change its whole approach. It is not enough to measure success by membership numbers or election results as has become the norm. Success needs to be measured by how successful the left is in building the struggle and mobilizing workers' organisations to lead the struggle of all oppressed.

### **Warfare, not welfare**

The British ex-minister George Robertson served in the Blair government and then became General Secretary of NATO. He is now demanding that the Labour government cut everything, welfare, the health service, education in order to step up arms expenditure. This is in contrast to Sanchez, who despite other criticisms, has stood up to Trump, and is resisting any involvement in his wars. After Spain's experience of its involvement in the Afghanistan war, any proposal to leave NATO or be kicked out would be quite popular. But in most countries, Generals and politicians are all demanding more money for the military, and no-one is opposing them.

But Germany is at the forefront of the warfare, not welfare process. This is accompanied by an ideological offensive to build anti-migrant hatred, specifically anti-Muslim and anti-Arab racism. These are the battering rams of the far-right. They use and abuse feminism and consciousness around gender-based violence by opposing feminism itself, then using instances of gender-based violence supposedly committed by people of color to whip up racism. Femonationalist groups which spread far-right ideas claiming they defend women or children and push anti-queer and racist policies, are appearing across Europe. .

Different economic policies can be found in right-wing populist and far-right organisations, depending on the country, and sometimes within the same organisation. Some combine far-right nationalism with ultra-liberal economic policies. This can be seen in sections of the AfD, or around the Bardella wing of *Rassemblement national* in France. In other places there can be what can be termed welfare chauvinism, such as that practised by PiS in Poland. Geert Wilders in the Netherlands, and the Le Pen wing of RN appears to be moving in that direction.

Thanks to the help of the ruling class, the far-right has managed to achieve a normalisation in recent years, a key pillar of which has been the glossing over of its anti-semitism. After October 7th, far-right forces have joined demonstrations against anti-semitism, and several far-right organisations participated in a conference in Israel on anti-semitism. They have turned their vile prejudices instead against other ethnic groups and the left. In Britain, a rally against “anti-semitism” was organised with the key speakers being the leader of the Tory party and deputy leader of Reform, on the very day he refused to condemn vile racist comments by a member of his own party.

The same is happening as far as gender based violence is concerned. In Germany recently the case of Collien Fernades, a well-known actress discovered that her ex-partner had been widely distributing AI-driven online abuse about her. When this was revealed #MeToo protests hit Hamburg, but Federal Chancellor Friedrich Merz used the case of this rich white man who had committed sexual violence against his former partner, turning it into an attack on immigrants. When there is no left opposing this normalisation people increasingly vote for the far-right parties, not despite, but because of their politics, and that includes a layer of working-class people.

This has been a general trend in many countries. First it was more affluent voters who supported the right-wing populist parties, only then did they make inroads into the working class. This happened with Trump 1.0, then Trump 2.0, during Brexit and now with parties such as Reform, AfD and Vox. .

In countries like Italy and Austria, the question of right-wing and far-right government alliances has become more prominent. They have already existed since the 1990s. But now in the Spanish State there is the prospect of such an alliance for 2027.

Elsewhere though in Belgium, France and Germany, there is still an official firewall against the far-right, a cordonne-sanitaire, but which is more rhetoric than anything else. While for now, the traditional right-wing parties still present themselves as the main protection against the far-right, they are already adopting their policies and are more open to far-right forces on the international level. As part of the trend in which support for the traditional parties of the centre is shrinking, the right wing is losing voters to far-right opponents, pointing towards an increased likelihood for far-right/right-wing coalition governments in the future.

There are already signs of movements in that direction. While the ruling class may still not be ready to put the far-right in government, a section is preparing the ground. The Bardella camp of RN is pulling together other forces together with some billionaire

support. In Germany, *Die Familienunternehmer* (Association of Family Entrepreneurs) have opened the door for contact with the AfD, while the CDU leadership have doubled financial support for a think tank that advocates for cooperation with the AfD.

For now if the current level of oppression, repression and authoritarian measures is deemed adequate, the ruling elite may hold back from further alliances, or the use of street violence with racist mobs and auxiliary fascist groups to secure the rule of profit and of the ruling class in power. There are signs that the far-right is, for now, reaching its limits in some countries. The AfD has complained about slower growth over the last year and Trump's increasingly erratic approach has played a negative role in Italy, Spain and Hungary. It would though be a mistake to think that there will be no further growth of the far-right - only when a genuine mass working -class based alternative develops can it be stopped.

### **The salami tactic**

A new government was elected in Czechia in the autumn of 2025, comprising two far-right parties, with another larger far-right party in opposition. The liberal parties and the left wing have been totally wiped out having themselves adopted nationalism.

In the former Soviet bloc states of eastern and central Europe, a strong sentiment developed after the restoration of capitalism that they had simply become colonies of Western capital. This mood against the status quo has been exploited by politicians in Poland, by Andrej Babis' party ANO in Czechia, and Orban in Hungary, with barely any opposition from the left and trade unions. As a consequence a layer of working class and poor have been taken in by the rhetoric. .

Now the far-right government simply pushes through the legislation it wants with barely any discussion, in much the same way as Trump pushes decisions through. They are, so far, too scared to launch an all out attack on working people, so they use the "salami tactic", - a slice of attack here, a slice of attack there.

Even this provoked a mass demonstration of a quarter of a million people, but as it was organised by the liberal opposition, it presented no real alternative or programme. This allows the government to carry on unencumbered. On his first day in office, the far-right environment minister declared that measures to stop climate change have been removed. They are stopping finance for sex-education in schools, for vaccination programmes.

What is important is that despite the hopeless liberal opposition, there have been youth protests, often with many different political views, but out of that there is a new trend developing. This year there was an important intervention on 8 March, one of the biggest in Prague in recent history when 500 participated in an “anti pro-life” demo, outnumbering the pro-life side. This is another example of how reaction provokes counter-reaction, but it also demonstrates the need for an intersectional approach. Increasingly, participants in anti-fascist and climate protests are seeing the need to follow the example of the IWD protests. Discussions are starting about how to spread the protests, and how to engage with the wider working class.

The class is still very disorientated. The polarisation in society is not between left and right, between the working class and the bourgeoisie, but is a polarisation between different elements of the ruling elite. So the working class is not yet recognising the need to act independently in defence of its own interests. There is though a layer of youth that is radicalizing, beginning to reject the perspective of joining one or other of the ruling camps, and this may start the process of changing the balance of forces.

It is certainly true that in countries like Hungary, Poland, Czechia and Slovakia as capitalism was restored they orientated more towards western capital than happened in Russia. After the shock therapy of the 1990s, neoliberalism was the only policy. When the social-democrats, usually former Stalinists, came to power they continued this approach. Key sectors of the economy in these countries were integrated into the value chains of West European capitalism. Bourgeois democracy, depending on the ‘rule of law’ created a stable framework for foreign investors to operate.

After 2008’s global financial crisis’ discontent against neoliberalism and austerity grew, generally reflected as movements against corruption or as a reaction against the effects of capitalist restoration. Independent working class parties are largely absent, and as, the left, the social democrats have been completely compromised by their actions in power, the right populist forces were able to redirect the social discontent away from confrontation with capitalism and focus on targets such as foreign capital, European Union institutions and the domestic liberal elites.

They were not questioning capitalism as such and when in power they started restructuring the state, bringing key institutions including the judiciary and the media under strict political party control. In Poland and Hungary the regime aimed to reduce the dominance of foreign capital in the economy, supposedly to defend so-called national sovereignty. Political patronage developed by placing loyalists within state

linked firms and financial institutions and state resources were channeled into their own pockets. The distinction between state party and capital became blurred.

The banking sector which was previously dominated by foreign capital was restructured. In Poland this repolonization of banks was a voluntary nationalization intended to consolidate support in society through what, for want of a better word, targeted redistribution policies to lean on a strata of society.

In Poland, the "Law and Justice" party (PiS) came to power on the basis of a mass movement of the organised working class. The trade union leaders failed to take the movement forward into the general strike which was definitely on the cards. This allowed the right-wing populists to channel this to win the election, but only after having to make concessions to the working class. It lowered the retirement age, introduced child benefit and a 13th and later a 14th pension payment. In this way the regime built a base of support among the rural and working class poor.

In Hungary, Viktor Orban's Fidesz party came to power after more general protests against corruption. Although the protests were against neoliberalism and there was a lot of discontent, there was no comparable mass working class mobilisation of trade unions similar to that in Poland. This meant that the targeted redistribution policies in Hungary, often called "perverse redistribution" moved money from the bottom to the top. Unemployment benefits were cut to last only three months, the shortest duration in Europe and the poor were forced onto a kind of public work scheme at very low pay.

So if in Poland there was a Robin Hood taking a small bit from the rich to give to the poor, in Hungary, the Sheriff of Nottingham robbed the poor to give to the rich. In Poland there was a sort of social populism with elements of neo-Keynesist economic policies, while in Hungary there was a national neoliberalism leaning more on the middle class.

In Poland a relatively new party is *Konfederacja* - essentially a merger of several smaller neo-fascist parties, that has been gaining support and now threatens to replace PiS in the polls. A smaller split is more openly fascist - between the two they currently poll at 20%. The danger is that in Poland, as in several other countries of this region, there is a large rural petty bourgeoisie and semi-proletariat, while a large part of the economy is dominated by small companies, self-employed people, family firms or sole proprietors. Support for *Konfederacja* is particularly strong among this layer, attracted in part by its libertarian economic policies similar to those of Milei. Young men are also attracted by its misogynist approach.

The other important factor driving support for *Konfederacja* is the growing disillusionment with the liberal coalition that took power after defeating PiS in 2023. It hasn't been able to turn back the structural changes implemented by PiS, punish those responsible for corruption, or overcome the veto of the President who is still from PiS to limit the role of the Catholic church. Many young people voted against PiS in 2023 wanting changes to the law on abortion rights, but that too has not happened.

This means that *Konfederacja's* appeal is to different layers - there's a socially conservative, reactionary layer, there are those attracted to libertarianism but who are maybe more progressive on social questions, like abortion and the church. The latter ignore that reactionary side of *Konfederacja* because of its economic program

This is where the danger lies in Hungary. There are expectations of a break with Orbánism now and the real danger is that if this doesn't happen there will be the further growth of the far-right. Support for Peter Magyar isn't uniform. There are former Fidesz supporters who are angry about corruption, conservative youth who are angry with the lack of economic prospects, but also more left wing or left leaning voters who voted for Magyar pragmatically.

### **Towards a preliminary conclusion**

In discussing the ideology of the right populism and the far right, it is clear that the reactionary social position in terms of women's rights, LGBTQ+ and trans rights could well be the breaking point for many youth who are initially attracted to them. The fact that Kast in Chile and Magyar in Hungary both played down these questions in their election campaigns is significant. The expectations that after Magyar's victory there will be no more bans on Budapest's Pride march will be high.

Another important aspect of right-populism and the far-right is their push for militarisation and war. The explosion of military brutality, and the waste of expenditure on arms - whether driven by the Russian imperialist invasion of Ukraine, Netanyahu's genocide in Gaza and expansionist drive in the West Bank and Lebanon, Trump's war on Iran or the continuing war in Sudan may initially cause shock but are issues that will result in a deepening radicalisation of the working class and youth.

As the old saying goes "Violence begets violence". Even in the aftermath of war, the violence continues. One of the reasons why the Kremlin resists ending the war is because it fears what will happen when the 3-400, 000 troops return home having been brutalised by war. By mid-2025 even before the end of the war, over 300 people had

been killed by soldiers who had returned from the front. Most of these were women and children. Against the background of the huge increase in misogynist legislation this decade there is the real potential for resistance by women and youth as the violence escalates.

Decades of neoliberal austerity, privatisation and the hollowing out of public services such as forestry management, fire control, flood protection compounded by the increasingly rapid escalation of climate change will be another huge challenge for the far right. Their blanket refusal to recognise climate change and in many cases promote policies extremely damaging to the climate and environment is another issue that can provoke resistance.

Even in those countries in which Bonapartism has been consolidated these are issues that still cause serious outbreaks of opposition. Most advanced has been the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement in Iran. Siberia in March was shaken by mass unrest after the authorities decided to cull cattle they claimed were ill. Dozens of police and riot troops were needed to quell the protests.

The nature of political work when Bonapartism is strongly consolidated such as in China, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia has a different character than that in which elements of bourgeois democracy still exist. Due to the repression of organisation, now with internet shutdowns, every effort has to be made to maintain political discussion and organisation in highly conspiratorial conditions. As discontent spills out in practically spontaneous outbursts, workers’ organisations need to be prepared to intervene.

But today, even when Bonapartism is developing, class struggle is still a determining factor. Bonapartist trends can be checked as has happened recently in Hungary and Peru.

There will be an understandable reaction from many activists that unity is needed to oppose right-populists and the far-right. This can take different forms - from ‘tactical voting’ in England where Labour and the Greens compete with each other to see who is better placed to beat Reform, or where left forces agree in advance to line up in support of opposition bourgeois candidates - this ‘lesser evil’ tactic has been used in Hungary, Turkey, Russia and elsewhere. Faced with a second round choice between the socialist Seguro and the far-right Chaga’s Ventura in Portugal’s Presidential election voters from other parties rallied around Seguro.

The truth is though, whichever of these electoral tactics succeeds, it only delays the day of reckoning, as the new government still works within the constraints of capitalism and will therefore be unable to resolve the underlying causes for the growth of the far-right.

As the far-right strengthens and Bonapartist tendencies become more widespread the use of violence increases dramatically. Even aside from the question of wars, state violence will be an increasing feature of life as is already seen in the actions of the French riot police and ICE in the US. Regime violence was brutal when faced with the GenZ uprisings in Bangladesh, Nepal, Kenya and elsewhere. When official state organs are not involved, the far-right can whip up violent gangs to attack immigrants, strikes, protests by women and the LGBTQ+.

Violence is after all a means of existence for capitalism. In many countries different wings of the bourgeois use gangster methods against opponents. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, over 100 leading business and political figures who have 'opposed' the Kremlin have been poisoned, hanged, or fallen from tall buildings as 'suicide' has occurred. They have frequently used, and will continue to do so, such methods against workers when they move into action.

Discussions will be needed about how the working class can defend itself and its activities from such violent attacks depending on concrete conditions in each country.

In many countries, the existence of Bonapartist regimes is not just a legacy of former colonial rule, but a means by which the current imperialist powers maintain their control over the nominally independent states. This in no way ensures stability. Bangladesh gained independence in the early 1970s, initially under the influence of the general anti-imperialist movement of that time. Elements of bourgeois democracy, and partial nationalisation were implemented, but the country quickly returned to one-party rule.

Over the next three decades there were at least 29 attempted coup d'états, some successful before an unstable democracy was established. The level of corruption was so great it resulted in the GenZ uprising in 2024. During the uprising the youth declared they had no confidence in any of the political forces, and wanted to change the system. When the new election arrived, the party set up by the students abandoned its independence and joined a block with the right-wing Islamists. They won six places in Parliament, but at the cost of the support of a significant layer of women.

This raises questions of how the left should act in such situations, and how it presents its programme in the movements opposing right-populism and

authoritarianism/Bonapartism. Increasingly the left has been unable to engage effectively in these struggles. One part simply tail ends the 'liberal' bourgeoisie, succumbing to illusions in bourgeois democracy. Another section - the 'campists' - view things in purely geopolitical terms, turning a blind eye to the authoritarian nature of whichever imperialist camp they support. A third group dismisses such struggles as conflicts between different wings of the bourgeois, that can, they say, only be solved after the socialist transformation. And yet they make no attempt to link the demands of those fighting repression, oppression, corruption, authoritarianism and the far right in such a way as to engage in the struggle while promoting the need for socialist change.

These issues will be addressed in the next part of this discussion.